

Diversity Leadership Guide

What is your Organizations Culture?

Every organization, as does every person, has a culture: A combination of tangible and intangible factors that make up members' experience of an organization and in one way or another shape or reshape their behavior.

- Nevis, Lancourt, Vassalo in Intentional Revolutions

Identifying Organizational Culture

What makes working for one company so very different from working for another company, even if the products and services are alike? Culture is what makes the difference. It is the characteristic that influences how a company handles its day-to-day operations, and it determines how an organization communicates with its employees. Culture affects the policies and procedures that are implemented. And culture is what gives an organization a different feel from other businesses in the same industry. Culture refers to the values, beliefs, and assumptions held by people in an organization, and the behaviors and practices that reinforce them. Practices include various infrastructures such as budgeting, systems, technologies, decision making, recruiting, processes, etc., that support the work, as well as people's perceptions of and feelings about the organization.

Types of culture

Every organization actually has two cultures. The **visible** culture is the one that is expressed in the company's charts, policies, and procedure manuals. This is the organization that is apparent to outsiders. The **shadow** organization is the informal day-to-day behavior carried on as a result of tradition and habit. It's what people do, rather than what they say.

The shadow organization is often more powerful than the visible organization. It has its own leaders and unwritten rules of operation. This shadow is influenced by the values and habits of accepted actions and activities. Think of it as a complex mesh of social forces that influence the behavior of each member of the organization. This makes up the norms of the organization.

Norms of operation are often formed by historical events within the organization. It may be representative of past victories, setbacks, rivalries and feuds. Additionally, this informal organization has these characteristics:

- It has its own communication channels.
- It has unofficial networks and cliques.
- It may determine how an employee feels.

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The shadow organization is what typically determines the average employee's experience at work. Interestingly enough, the higher individuals are in the organization, the less in-touch they will be with the understanding of what an average workday is like for an average employee.

One can gain awareness of the shadow organization by exploring four areas with your employees:

- How employees feel about themselves.
- How employees feel about their jobs.
- How employees feel about their teammates.
- How employees view the organization.

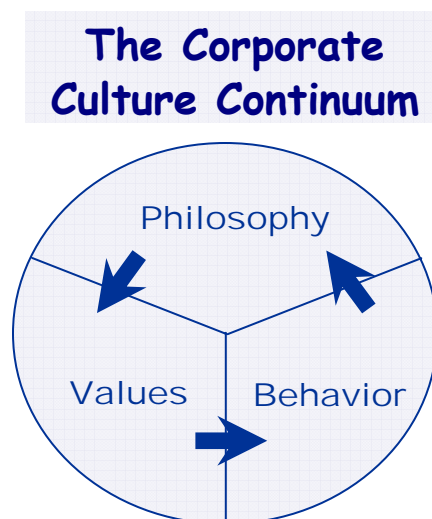
When employees like themselves, their jobs, their teams, and their organization, they are more likely to be energetic, involved, and committed employees. They are also more likely to create that same environment for the other people with whom they work.

The Role of Leadership

Successful leadership requires being in touch with the real culture of the organization. This is an integral part of giving meaning to work.

Giving purpose, meaning, and direction to work is a fundamental leadership role. The art of molding an organizational culture that enhances meaning requires a leader who is willing to participate with employees rather than simply direct them. It takes time and energy. However, the payoff is in having the information that allows you to shape a compelling vision around which employees can rally.

The leadership or management of an organization has a major influence on the culture. The employees tend to pay attention to what the manager does, not what he says, making conscious or unconscious decisions about their manager's/leader's commitment to the organization's goals and visions. The belief system of the manager, as demonstrated by her actions, will usually be adopted by many employees.



Culture: A system of beliefs and values that develop within an organization that guides the behavior of its members.

How to Understand your Current Culture

The following abbreviated list is drawn from Edgar Schein's 1983 studies of leadership and culture of the mechanisms by which organizational reality is transmitted by key leaders and embedded in an organization infrastructure to ensure sustainability:

1. Formal statements of organizational philosophy.
2. Design of physical spaces.
3. Deliberate role modeling, teaching and coaching by leaders.
4. Explicit reward and promotion criteria.
5. Stories, legends, myths and parables about key people and events.
6. What leaders pay attention to, measure, and control.

Pre-dialogue Activity

Take a walk around your building, and look at some of the physical signs of culture. Try to be an impartial observer of your culture in action.

- How is the space allocated? Where are the offices located?
- How much space is given to whom? Where are people located?
- What is posted on bulletin boards or displayed on walls?
- How are common areas utilized?

Then take notice of human interaction:

- What do people write to one another? What is said in memos or e-mail? What is the tone of messages (formal or informal, pleasant or hostile, etc.)? How often do people communicate with one another? Is all communication written, or do people communicate verbally?
- What interaction between employees do you see? How about between employees and managers?
- What are the stories and/or myths sustained in your organization? Think about your unit and the Center.

In your dialogue session, be prepared to talk about what you noticed and learned.

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Then consider developing a cultural statement.

Developing a Cultural Statement

Create a cultural statement:

- If you would like to formalize the culture.
- If the culture is not as strong as you would like.
- To document a culture that is already strong and customer-focused.

Questions to Ask	Answers
How would we describe our organizational culture today?	
What is our vision and mission?	
What kind of culture do we want to see?	
What type of organizational culture will be needed to serve our customers?	
What changes must be met to achieve our desired culture? <ul style="list-style-type: none">• By when?• Who will be responsible ?• How can we be more creative?	

Excerpted from SkillSoft and about.com Human Resources

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